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THE PROBLEM OF THE NAVY PERSONNEL.

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THERE has been much reference during the last few years, in Congress and in the press, to the condition of the navy personnel. No one doubts that the personnel is all right, as far as individuals are concerned; but there seems to be trouble about numbers and arrangement, and especially about the age of the higher officers.

The question of numbers is in the way of settlement by means of the large classes now passing through Annapolis. The other matters are not in so satisfactory a state. The public, perhaps, has not paid much attention to the subject. They may have thought it an agitation on the part of the officers to secure quicker promotion. If this were true, it would not be a matter of serious consequence. But there is more in it. If it were only a question of what officers thought they were entitled to, and if they could bring Congress to their way of thinking, the public would be satisfied, but would not feel called on to take part. It may as well be stated, however, that in what follows the results to officers are left entirely out of consideration. The question goes beyond individuals.

The principal trouble with the personnel at this time is that admirals reach their grade on the average at from sixty to sixty-one years of age and retire by law at sixty-two. But, it may be said, if this is a drawback, why is it not perfectly easy to correct it? Why cannot admirals be promoted as early as may be necessary? It seems simple, but it cannot be done without changing the existing law, in which the present conditions are inherent. Then the law should be changed,

So far, so good; but, on trying to devise a suitable change, complications seem to arise on every side. One serious compli-

cation is that the navy list is at present in an exceedingly abnormal condition, the result of past legislation, in that the various Naval Academy classes composing the list differ in numbers from four to 200. This would not matter if the four were near the top of the list and the variations were regular. But the small classes are near the middle of the list, with large classes at the top and bottom. As a result, nearly all the measures heretofore proposed are complicated, occupying several pages in the wording, are more or less difficult of comprehension, and are open to doubt as to their satisfactory working even though they should be enacted into law. It may be accepted that unless some simple measure shall be devised that can be expressed in a few lines, the working of which shall be perfectly plain, a change will be of doubtful expediency.

The principles of personnel and promotion are in themselves reasonably simple. The only difficulty seems to be the mass of details to be brought into harmony. As simple as the principles are, there are some that have never been recognized in this country. They are in the nature of truisms, and of course must be taken into account sooner or later. It will be the effort of this paper to indicate some of these essential principles, and then to show how a few of the most important may be put into practice.

The problem of the personnel, so far as the line is concerned, may be stated very simply as follows: to devise a means whereby admirals may serve, on the average, more than one or two years on the active list before reaching the age of retirement. From recent official information, the average length of service of admirals in certain foreign navies was as follows: German, six years; British, eight years; Japanese, eleven years; French, fourteen years. In our own navy the average length of service as admiral is about a year and a half.

Future naval wars will be settled by battleship actions in fleets, as was the Russo-Japanese war. Handling a fleet successfully is an art which requires much study, but, above all, practice in manœuvres. An admiral who has to acquire this practice and fight his action all within a period of two years will be at a great disadvantage as against an admiral who may have served ten years in his grade.

To correct this state of affairs in our own navy is really the only problem of the personnel at this moment. If admirals reach their

grade early enough to allow of an adequate length of service in the grade, it is obvious that captains and all other officers of lower grades will likewise reach their grades sufficiently early.

The problem may be solved in a number of ways. In our navy only, of those quoted, it has not been solved at all, at least not to the extent of legislative enactment. The present condition in our service arises very simply and naturally. A certain number of young men enter each year at the bottom and go up step by step, and eventually some of them reach the top. Suppose there are 100 entries each year from the Naval Academy. If the age of graduation is twenty-two and the age of retirement is sixty-two, there will be forty years of service. Each year there is a certain loss in each class, due to casualties, resignations, etc. This has been found by experience to be very close to three per cent. each year in all parts of the list. That is, after a year there will be ninety-seven in the class, after two years ninety-four, and so on; and after forty years there will be thirty. Hence, if thirty admirals only are allowed, and all have entered at the same age, then all the admirals on the list will be in the last year of their service. The result is thus inherent in the system of simple step by step promotion in order of seniority, and cannot be avoided as long as the system is retained.

There have been two general methods advocated for correcting this condition of affairs. One is to select officers for promotion, those selected thus passing a shorter time in the intermediate grades, and reaching flag rank earlier than they otherwise would. This method to be effective is coupled with an age retirement in the various grades. That is, officers not selected, when they become too old for the duties of their grade, are retired. The age varies according to the grade. A captain not selected for promotion might retire at fifty-five, a commander at fifty, and so on. This method is called "selection," or "selection-up."

The other method that has been advocated is to promote to all the grades by age or length of service, without regard to the numbers thus obtained in the various grades, and then to set aside out of the line of promotion as many in each grade as may not be needed for the duties of the grade. The officers thus set aside would receive no further promotion and would not continue to go to sea. They could, however, be given a shore duty, and would have the option of retiring after a certain number of years' total

service. (Any officer in the navy may by present law retire after thirty years' service). This method is called "selection-out," or "elimination."

Either system can be made to work. The arguments *pro* and *con* are somewhat as follows: Selection-up is more like the conditions in civil life, where the ablest men quickly come to the top. There is no reason why bright young officers should serve the full time in the lower grades, but they may be brought quickly to positions of responsibility and command and thus have a longer period of service in the upper grades, where their ability will be productive of the greatest good. The disadvantage is that the older officers in each grade have lost hope and are merely serving their time until they can retire. While a commander at thirty is full of ambition and zeal, those nearing fifty know they can go no higher and are a drag on the rest. So there is no improvement on the average. Then the conditions are not entirely the same as in civil life, owing to the absence of personal freedom in the service. A man is free to make his own position in civil life, but he is not equally free in the service, as he must go where his orders take him. Still, on account of the desirableness of having young men serve long periods in the higher grades, the plan presents many advantages. What the service itself thinks of the plan is not of material consequence; but as a matter of fact, selection-up is usually dreaded for fear that influence and favoritism may count for too much in the selection.

Selection-out, or elimination, has the advantage that the officers in the same grade have all about the same length of service, are of a suitable age for the proper performance of the duties of the grade, and serve long enough in each grade thoroughly to master the duties of the grade. Then the process of selecting out the least efficient in the grade raises the average of those who remain and there are no heartburnings in the active service. Those with a grievance take it with them out of the service. Selection may still be observed in the various grades, but selection of a different order—that is, selection for duty and command. Though the young men of each grade are not so young as the youngest of those in the former plan, nevertheless the captains and admirals all reach their grades reasonably young and have ample time in the grade to make their service of value. The least efficient suffer about the same by either method, but in selection-

out those who remain keep their same relative place and there are no heartburnings. This method appeals more strongly to the service itself than that of selection-up.

From what has been said earlier in this paper, it is quite clear that some method must be followed to accomplish the object proposed at the outset—that is, to insure that admirals shall be promoted early enough to serve a reasonable time in their grade before retirement. It might be supposed that these methods, by increasing the retired list, would increase also the expense. This would be objectionable, certainly; but, in a case of urgent necessity, expense should not prove an insuperable obstacle. As a matter of fact, however, the expense need not be increased. Though the number of retired officers may be increased, their average pay is decreased, and the total may remain about the same.

Under the present method, practically all officers retire as senior rear-admirals. The cost of the retired list is thus the number retiring multiplied by the number of years of expectation of life multiplied by the retired pay of a senior rear-admiral. By the American mortality tables, the expectation of life at the age of sixty-two is about thirteen years; consequently, for such period, practically all officers retiring for age receive the maximum rate of pay. By the method of elimination, or by that of selection, relatively few officers retire at the maximum rate of pay; a medium number retire as captain or commander, and a relatively large number retire as lieutenant-commander. The average rate of pay is thus very much lower, and the gain may be sufficient to allow for the pay of officers selected out before reaching the age of sixty-two. By a method proposed by the writer, in the "Proceedings of the Naval Institute" for September, 1906, the cost of the retired list is actually reduced.

As has been stated earlier in this article, these questions have been settled in all the principal foreign navies. It will not be uninteresting to state briefly the practice in the English, French, German and Japanese navies.

Promotion in the British Navy in the lower grades is entirely by selection. After reaching the grade of captain, officers retain their relative position with regard to each other and go up step by step entirely by seniority through the grades of rear-admiral, vice-admiral, and admiral, but are selected for the highest grade, admiral of the fleet. (We have no grades higher than rear-ad-

miral. Admiral Dewey has the special rank of Admiral of the Navy, but the grade expires with him.) Admirals of the fleet retire at seventy, admirals and vice-admirals at sixty-five, rear-admirals at sixty, captains at fifty-five, commanders at fifty, lieutenants at forty-five, sub-lieutenants at forty. In addition, if an officer remains unemployed for from three to three and a half years, it becomes necessary for him to go on the retired list. This is the plan usually followed in the case of captains and admirals who may be found unfitted for their duties. The English method is therefore selection-up and retirement for age in each grade or by lack of employment.

The French method is a combination of selection and seniority, but reverses the order, as compared with the English. That is, most of the earlier promotions are by seniority, whereas all the later ones are by selection. Thus, two-thirds of the promotions of ensigns are by seniority and one-third by selection; of lieutenants half by seniority and half by selection; and in the higher grades all by selection. Vice-admirals are retired at sixty-five, rear-admirals at sixty-two, captains at sixty, commanders at fifty-eight, lieutenants at fifty-three.

In the German Navy promotion is by seniority, with elimination of the unfit, or those whose services may no longer be required. There is complaint that the age of the higher officers is too great, due presumably to insufficient elimination.

In the Japanese Navy promotion is exclusively by selection, but in the grade of captain it follows quite closely the order of seniority. Below captain, selection is very free. The retiring ages in the grades are as follows: admirals, sixty-eight; vice-admirals, sixty-five; rear-admirals, fifty-eight; captains, fifty-three; commanders, forty-eight; lieutenant-commanders, forty-five; lieutenants, forty-three; junior lieutenants and ensigns, thirty-eight.

The condition of our navy list at the present time is somewhat peculiar, but not in any way such as to prevent placing it on a perfectly satisfactory basis within a very short time. The peculiarity lies in the fact that the various Naval Academy classes now constituting the list have varied in strength to a remarkable degree. At the head of the list the classes are large, the remains of the old "hump," as it was called—that is, the classes that entered about the time of the Civil War and for a few years thereafter, which classes were abnormally large. Beginning with the

class that entered in 1877, a rule went into effect (legislation of 1882) limiting the appointment of the yearly graduates to a number sufficient only to fill the existing vacancies. Some of the classes of about that time contain at present not over 4 to 10 members. The large majority of the members of these classes were discharged at the time of graduation for lack of vacancies. The result is that all the present middle of the list is made up of abnormally small classes, and there is no really large class until we come to the class that graduated in 1905, which now comprises a hundred-odd members. The present graduating classes are of double strength, numbering about 200 (legislation of 1903, to continue until 1913).

This present condition of the navy list is really the key to any satisfactory solution of the existing problems of promotion. Imagine, for instance, that there have been normal graduating classes of say 100 members, and that as the years have gone by the classes have gradually and uniformly diminished in numbers, from natural causes or by retirement of the least fitted, until it is now found that a suitable adjustment exists between numbers and length of service, and that the higher officers now reach their grades at suitable ages. The actual navy list, as contrasted with such an ideal list, shows entering classes 200 strong, small classes all through the middle of the list for twenty-five years, and large classes again at the top; two "humps" with a "trough" in the middle. The "trough," as has been seen, was formed by the legislation of 1882. The classes composing it were by that act reduced below the possibilities of any plan of elimination or selection that could ever be advocated or desired. Hence, when they get to the top of the list, as they will in ten or twelve years, promotion will be as satisfactory as possible. In the mean time, the old "hump" blocks the way. It is not probable that the new "hump" will ever be troublesome, as it will no more than fill the depleted "trough."

Thus it is seen that, for the present, there is no obstacle to officers reaching flag rank early enough to be of some use while on the active list, save only the remains of the old "hump." The problem, then, is so to dispose of this "hump," or a part of it, as to allow admirals to reach their grade at about fifty-five years of age, instead of at over sixty as at present, the age of retirement being sixty-two. We have thus again reached the state-

ment that was made at the outset. There is evidently one very simple method of solution—that is, to promote all the captains who are over that age, or, what is better, those that have a length of service corresponding to that age on the average. There would evidently result too many admirals. The excess could be allowed to retire voluntarily, and, failing a sufficient number of voluntary applications, the remaining necessary number could be selected out.

It may be pointed out that this measure would result in a positive financial gain to the Government. The main reason is that without such action these officers would nearly all in course of time become senior rear-admirals and retire at the rate of pay of that grade. The gain is in retiring them instead as junior rear-admirals. It may be shown that, taking account of all the circumstances, each such retirement would save the Government about \$20,000. The measure thus has everything to commend it.

The best way to put it into effect would be to enact a law that any captain over fifty-five years of age could, with the approval of the President, retire at any time as a junior rear-admiral. Such a law in conjunction with the present personnel law, which may force a certain number of captains each year to retire as commodores, might be found to be all that was necessary. Any one of such captains would naturally prefer to go voluntarily as a junior rear-admiral, and at his own convenience, rather than to be forced out at the end of the year as a commodore. If, however, at the end of a couple of years the results should not be found entirely satisfactory, then another law promoting all captains with a length of service corresponding to fifty-five years of age on the average, and a forced retirement from the grade of rear-admiral of the excess over the number required, would accomplish the rest.

The above measures will thus clearly bring admirals to their grade reasonably young. Incidentally, the captains and commanders will also be young. This condition will continue during the whole period the “trough” is passing through the upper grades—that is, for about twenty-five years. During the passage of the “trough” there need be neither selection nor elimination, for the classes composing it have already been over-selected out by the legislation of 1882. Nor need the new “hump” give us any uneasiness. It is probable that the natural expansion of the

navy will dispose of it inside of twenty-five years; but, if it does not, it may be treated as it is now proposed to treat the old one.

But there is another matter that is beginning to give trouble now and will become worse year by year. By present law, the numbers in the grades are fixed, and amount to 750 down to and including lieutenants. In addition, there are at present about 670 ensigns and graduated midshipmen. These ensigns and midshipmen are most of them performing the duty of lieutenants. For a number of years to come, midshipmen will be graduating at the rate of about 200 annually—that is, during the time the classes of double strength are passing through the Academy (the last double class enters in 1913). But as we can have only 750 officers down to and including lieutenants, these new graduates will be accumulating all this time in the junior grades, and by 1913 will amount to about 1250. We shall thus have the illogical proportion of nearly two-thirds the whole navy below the rank of lieutenant.

The trouble is that the 750 down to and including lieutenants were based on a total of about 1000. When the total shall have reached 2000 it is clear that the 750 will not be a suitable proportion.

In other words, the junior grades will be filled out of all proportion and the senior grades will still be short. Thus, fixed numbers in the grades are logical only when the total number is fixed. When the total number is varying rapidly, fixed numbers are entirely illogical.

The remedy is, of course, apparent. By making the numbers in the grades percentages of the whole, then, no matter how the total may vary, the proportions will still remain correct. The proper proportions have been worked out a number of times in official reports and other papers. A study of these results seems to show that the following are reasonable percentages for all the grades below that of rear-admiral, including graduated midshipmen, viz: captains, 5 per cent.; commanders, 6 per cent.; lieutenant-commanders, 16 per cent.; lieutenants, 40 per cent.; lower grades, 33 per cent.

The following table shows the navy list below flag rank as it stands to-day, and the prospective list for 1913, with the numbers in the grades as by the present law and as they would be if the above percentages should be adopted.

Rank.	Present Law.		Proposed Law.		1913.
	1908.	1913.	Percentage.	1908.	
Captain	70	70	5	70	98
Commander	112	112	6	84	118
Lieutenant-Commander	200	200	16	224	315
Lieutenant	350	350	40	560	788
Lower grades	668	1238	33	462	651
Total	1400	1970	100	1400	1970

The briefest inspection of the above table shows the benefits that would be derived from such a change. The officers now banking up at the foot of the list would be suitably distributed in all the grades by the new plan, whereas by the present plan there is no attempt whatever at such distribution.

The perfectly simple changes that have been described above would put the personnel on an entirely satisfactory basis for the next few years. After 1913, however, the present law of entry of midshipmen will have expired, and there will have to be some measure to regulate the admissions in accordance with the needs of the service. This is fortunately as simple as the rest. The purpose of the personnel is to officer the ships. The number of serviceable ships is always a known quantity, and the number of officers needed will bear a certain relation to the number and size of ships. This relation has been worked out in official reports at various times. It may be expressed in the number of officers required per thousand tons of shipping. Considering our own needs and foreign practice, it may be shown that three officers (including midshipmen at the Naval Academy) per thousand tons of serviceable and authorized shipping is a reasonable and moderate ratio.

In this country the fact that such a relation exists has never been given its full importance. Navies are usually estimated in numbers of ships of the various types, armies in numbers of regiments. In appropriating for ships it is very easy to overlook the necessity for officers and men to man them; but in appropriating for regiments, it is the officers and men themselves that constitute the regiments, and it is they that are provided for. A steamship line in acquiring new ships would naturally and necessarily provide for additional officers and men to man them. This practice has never obtained with regard to the navy. Owing to its continuous oversight, it was found, some six years ago, that, while the new navy had been building, no provision had been made for

additional officers, and as a result the personnel was short by a number equivalent to 100 per cent. of itself. An article by the writer in *THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW* for September, 1902, entitled "The Navy's Greatest Need," showed this condition very fully. At the next session of Congress, *post hoc*, but not *ergo propter hoc*, the condition was remedied in a measure by doubling the appointments to the Naval Academy for a subsequent period of ten years. At the end of this period, the total will be very close to full strength at the ratio above stated—that is, three officers and midshipmen to every thousand tons of shipping. By enacting a law at such time that future admissions to the Naval Academy shall be regulated in a manner to preserve this ratio, there would be no further trouble as to adequate numbers. This change could be made very readily. The present method of appointment is that the President and each Senator and Representative may maintain a certain number of appointees at the Academy. Under the proposed method they would make appointments in regular rotation to the extent each year that should be found necessary.

At this point it will perhaps seem tolerably clear that the question of the personnel, which should in reason be perfectly simple, is in reality sufficiently complicated. The complications, however, are in the details and not in the principles. If by a few simple and fundamental measures the principles can be satisfactorily complied with, the details may then be left to themselves. The measures thus recommended are:

1. A temporary one; allow captains over fifty-five years of age to retire at any time as junior rear-admirals (at an average saving to the Government of \$20,000 for each retirement);
2. After a couple of years, promote all captains with service corresponding to an average age of fifty-five years to the grade of rear-admiral, and should there be an excess of rear-admirals, select out such excess from the whole grade;
3. Immediate and urgent; arrange all the officers on the list below flag rank in a percentage of the whole for each grade instead of in fixed numbers as at present, which present method allows the new graduates to bank up at the bottom;
4. As early as practicable, but at all events before 1913, when the present law of appointment of midshipmen will expire, arrange that appointments to the Naval Academy shall be made in

order of rotation of the various nominating authorities and in such numbers each year as will maintain the total strength of the personnel in a fixed ratio to the amount of shipping.

In the course of a generation, it may be necessary to devise a measure of a similar nature to some of the above to regulate the new "hump"; but this is not certain, nor indeed probable.

The measures thus advocated are all of great simplicity, a matter of much importance in legislation. Their adoption, so far as can be now foreseen, would put the navy personnel on an entirely satisfactory basis for practically all time.

One matter has not been considered—the question of vice-admirals and admirals. It is difficult to understand why our navy alone has no vice-admirals or admirals. It cannot be the expense, for that is insignificant compared with the cost of the navy. It does not seem in accordance with military principles that the commander-in-chief of a fleet, with possibly six rear-admirals under his command, should have the same rank as they. Then, too, it is derogatory to the dignity of the country that our naval representative, in his official intercourse with other nationalities, perhaps in joint operations, no matter what the importance of his command, should always be outranked by a foreign admiral. Our fleet in its present cruise around the world, commanded by a rear-admiral, has by its impressiveness often caused that commander to be received in courtesy with the salutes and honors of a higher rank, and to be given a precedence which in joint operations would not have been his. This condition, which has so little to commend it, may well be corrected.

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